

IN THE CLAIMS:

1-4 (Canceled).

5 (Currently Amended). A bulk food product slicing machine comprising:

a rotatable blade (~~800, 2800~~) having a sharp edge for slicing a bulk food product;

a motor (~~1400, 3400~~) operably connected to said rotatable blade (~~800, 2800~~) for rotating said blade against a bulk food product to slice the bulk food product into slices; and

a blade sharpening assembly (~~900, 2900~~) moveably mounted adjacent to said rotatable blade (~~800, 2800~~) and having at least one sharpening stone for sharpening said rotatable blade (~~800, 2800~~) when moved into blade sharpening position with said sharpening stone (~~912, 2908~~) engaging the edge of said blade; said sharpening stone (~~912, 2908~~) normally positioned radially outward from and above the edge of said blade and being substantially shielded from slicing debris during operation of the food product slicing machine by a retractable shield (~~910, 2917~~) mounted adjacent to said sharpening stone (~~912, 2908~~); said retractable shield (~~910, 2917~~) being retracted from said sharpening stone (~~912, 2908~~) as said sharpening stone (~~912, 2908~~) is moved linearly downwardly into blade sharpening position.

6 (Currently Amended). A bulk food product slicing machine comprising:

a rotatable blade (~~2800~~) having blade edge for slicing a bulk food product;

a motor (~~3400~~) operably connected to said rotatable blade (~~2800~~) for rotating said blade against a bulk food product to slice the bulk food product into slices; and

a blade sharpening assembly (~~2900~~) having a sharpening stone (~~2908~~) adapted to engage said blade edge for sharpening, a spring for biasing (~~2907~~) the sharpening stone (~~2908~~) away from said blade edge into a normal position radially outward from and above said blade edge, a guide (~~2904~~) for directing the movement of said sharpening stone (~~2908~~) along a linear path toward the blade edge for sharpening and away from the blade after sharpening, and an actuator (~~2903~~) for causing said sharpening stone (~~2908~~) to move linearly downwardly along said guide (~~2904~~) until said sharpening stone (~~2908~~) engages said blade edge for sharpening said blade wherein said blade sharpening assembly (~~2900~~) is self adjusting to difference in blade diameter.

7 (Currently Amended). The bulk food product slicing machine of Claim 6 wherein said blade sharpening assembly (2900) includes a position sensor (2926) for detecting the presence of the blade sharpening assembly (2900) on the slicing machine, said position sensor (2926) being electrically connected to said motor (3400) such that said motor (3400) cannot rotate said blade (2800) in the absence of said blade sharpener assembly (2900).

8 (Currently Amended). The bulk food product slicing machine of Claim 6 wherein said blade sharpening assembly (2900) also includes a retractable shield (2917) for covering said sharpening stone (2908) when said retractable shield (2917) is biased away from said blade (2800) after sharpening.

9-18 (Canceled).

19 (New). A bulk food product slicing machine comprising:

a rotatable blade having blade edge for slicing a bulk food product;
a motor operably connected to said rotatable blade for rotating said blade against a bulk food product to slice the bulk food product into slices; and
a blade sharpener including a stone assembly with a pivotally mounted sharpening stone and a pivotally mounted deburring stone adapted for engaging said blade edge for sharpening, a spring for biasing the stone assembly away from said blade edge, a guide for directing the movement of said sharpening stone along a linear path toward the blade edge for sharpening and away from the blade edge after sharpening, and an actuator assembly for first causing said stone assembly to pivot and thereafter causing said stone assembly to move linearly along said guide until said sharpening stone and said deburring stone engage said blade edge.